PROTOTYPE FUND

Application guide

Contents

Introduction 3
Funding criteria 4
General information 5
Eligibility 6
Short project description 7
Project description 8
Social issue 9
Technical realization 10
Current status 11
Link to the project 12
Innovation 13
Alternatives 14
User & target group 15
User & target group 16
Milestones 17
Team 18
Experience 19
Eligibility 20
Working hours 21
Motivation 22
Second Stage 23
Second Stage funding 24
Second Stage: focus 25
Second Stage: milestones 26
Checkboxes 27
Checklist: I have checked carefully that 28
After the application 29

Introduction

This handbook explains how to correctly fill in the application form for Prototype Fund and gives tips and advice on how to write the best possible proposal for your project.

The handbook is structured so that you can either read it as a whole to prepare for your application, or use it as a reference if you get stuck with certain parts of the application. You will find a page for each section of the application in this handbook, which you can find using the table of contents.

Starting with this application phase, the Prototype Fund offers three funding tracks. While the application forms for all funding tracks are structured as uniformly as possible, there are a few differences. We have marked questions that are not relevant to all tracks accordingly. An overview of the similarities and differences among the funding tracks is available here.

Throughout this handbook, there are many references to "we". This refers to the various stakeholders who organize and facilitate the Prototype Fund: The Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space, the program management agency VDI/VDE-IT that takes care of the administrative aspects of funding, the support and accompanying research team of the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany and, of course, our jury who select the projects.

The handbook is updated on an ongoing basis. If you have any further questions, please refer to our FAQ or contact the Prototype Fund team at info@prototypefund.de.

At the end of this document you will find a checklist. Please read it carefully to avoid mistakes that could lead to the direct exclusion of your application.

You can find more information about the application timeline and the funding terms on our website.

Version: September 2026 – Application phase for Class 03

Funding criteria

Before we go into the detail of each of the questions on the application form, here is some important information that you should be aware of before applying for the Prototype Fund.

Please note: the following eligibility criteria must be met before an application can be considered! Unfortunately we often cannot consider great and exciting applications because these criteria are not met. We really don't want that to happen! So please be careful and don't make these mistakes when applying.

- We only support the development of free and open source software. This means: no hardware, no software that will not be released under a FOSS license, no campaigns, etc.
- We only support individual developers or small teams of up to four people. Companies, universities, research institutions and other organizations and associations are not eligible to apply.

- Applications should be comprehensible: You should write so that even someone who is not an expert in the field of the project can understand what you want to do. We recommend having the application proofread by an external person before submitting it.

- Applications are only valid if they comply with the permitted word count per question.

Resources for a good application

- This handbook!

- Examples (in German) of good applications (we have funded these projects). Please note that these applications were submitted for a slightly different version of the Prototype Fund. Although the content of the applications does not entirely fit our current criteria, they are nonetheless worth reading to understand what we expect.

- Our application FAQ

1. General information

Projekttitel

[In English: Project title]
Regardless of whether it is the final name of your project or a working title, we would like to know what your project is called at this stage.

Name für den Account

[In English: Name for the account]
The user account on the application platform will be created under this name. This can be a real name, a pseudonym or a team name.

Vorname / Name

[In English: Surname / Name]
Even if you have created the account with a pseudonym or team name, we would like to know the full name of the main contact person for the application. This person should be the project lead, responsible for submitting the formal application. For this reason, they must be based in Germany.

E-Mail-Adresse

[In English: e-mail address]
How can we notify you of our decision to accept or reject your application? Here you can enter the e-mail address of the main contact person for the application or an e-mail address that can be used to reach the entire team. Please make sure you check this mailbox regularly so that you don't miss the application workshop if your proposal is accepted!

Hast du einen Account bei GitHub, BitBucket oder einer ähnlichen Plattform? Wenn ja, gib bitte den entsprechenden Link an.

[In English: Link: GitHub, BitBucket, or similar]
Please enter the personal Github account (or Bitbucket, Gitlab etc.) of the main contact person for the application – the link to the project will be requested in a later step. If you don't have an account on these platforms, you can enter another link, such as one to your resume or personal website. Please explain in the “Erfahrungen, Motivation” field below why you can't share any code you've written with us.

1a. Eligibility

THIS QUESTION APPLIES ONLY TO THE FUNDING TRACK ‘UP AND COMING’.

*Bewerbt ihr euch als Team um die Förderung?Bewirbst du dich/bewerbt ihr euch mit einem*r Mentor*in für die Förderung?*

[In English: Are you applying for funding as a team? Are you applying with a mentor for the grant?]
The size of the team must be fixed at the time of the proposal. You can specify the number of hours per person further down. The mentor may be over 26 years old, does not need to be registered as a student, and must be able to provide you (and your team) with practical support.Please only apply with a mentor if that person is willing to be part of the GbR. If you are getting support from someone who does not wish to be officially funded, you can let us know in the ‘Experience, Motivation’ field (see below).

*Alle Bewerber*innen (außer ggf. Mentor*in) sind unter 26 Jahre alt oder für ein Studium/eine informatische Ausbildung angemeldet*

[In English: All applicants (except, where applicable, the mentor) are under 26 years old or enrolled in a computer science apprenticeship/a university degree.]
Applicants must be at least 18 years old at the time of application and no older than 25 years old when the funding period begins on June 1st, 2027. All funding recipients over the age of 25 (with the exception of a mentor) must provide evidence that they are enrolled or registered for a degree course or an IT training programme when the funding period begins on June 1st, 2027.
Missing or incorrect information may result in exclusion from funding at later stages of the application process.

*Bist du oder sind deine Teammitglieder Gesellschafter*innen einer GmbH (oder andere Unternehmensform), haben einen Verein oder eine Organisation gegründet oder arbeiten für einen thematisch mit dem Projekt verbundenen Verein, ein Forschungsinstitut o. Ä. ?*
Wenn ja, erläutere, weshalb das Projekt nicht dazu dient, eine für den eigenen Geschäftsbetrieb benötigte Software zu entwickeln.

See 13, “Eligibility”, on page 20

2. Short project description

Beschreibe dein Projekt in einem Satz.
[In English: Describe your project in one sentence.]

Why do we ask this question?	Many applicants focus so much on describing the details and relevance of their projects that they forget to tell us exactly what they want to build. Before we read on, we'd first like to understand what the specific outcome of the funding period should be. In short: **What** exactly is the intended outcome of the project?
Length	30 words max.
What do we like reading here? *Note: These are examples, you do not have to address all points.*	• One sentence, no long explanation • A specific description: for example, "I would like to add a function to the Linux kernel that encrypts the hard drive when the laptop screen is closed" or "My project is a 'local-first' text editor that enables secure, decentralised and privacy-friendly collaborative working".
What don't we want to read here?	• Context: 'In the age of AI, privacy and ecology are more relevant than ever.' Please get straight to the point.

3. Project description

Beschreibe dein Projekt kurz.
[In English: Briefly describe your project.]

Why do we ask this question?	First we would like to know what you want to build during the 6-month funding period. Try to describe as concretely and simply as possible what software you want to work on and why this is important. In short: **What** do I want to do?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here? *Note: These are examples, you do not have to address all points.*	• A brief description of what goals you want to achieve with your software project • A brief description of how your software project should work • The backstory of your idea: How did you come up with it? In what context should the project work? • Why you think the project is important
What don't we want to read here?	• A project description that is only technical (this will come later)

4. Social issue

Welche gesellschaftliche Herausforderung willst du mit dem Projekt angehen?
[In English: Which social issue do you want to address with the project?]

Why do we ask this question?	All projects supported through Prototype Fund have a clear social added value. Here we want to understand how you want to contribute to solving a social issue with your project. In short: **Why** is your project important for society?
Length	175 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• A short, concise and clear description of the social issue you have identified • Why this issue urgently needs to be solved • The current situation: What is missing to solve the issue? • Why software can contribute to solving the issue
What don't we want to read here?	• Tech-solutionism: We don't expect magical solutions, but practicable approaches.

5. Technical realization

Wie willst du dein Projekt technisch umsetzen?
[In English: How do you want to realize your project on a technical level?]

Why do we ask this question?	Time for the technical aspects! Even if detailed questions are often only clarified during the funding phase, you should already be able to roughly explain how you will implement the project at the time of application. Based on your description, we need to be able to assess whether the project is feasible in this form and whether your plan to use various technical components makes sense. In short: **How** will the project be implemented?
Length	175 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Concrete information on the tech stack: programming languages, frameworks, libraries, details on infrastructure, etc. • Projects you want to build on – we firmly believe that you don't always have to reinvent the wheel! • Concise sentences that make it clear how the tools will be used
What don't we want to read here?	• Plans that are too vague: Terms such as "a website", "an app" are not sufficient to be able to evaluate the project technically. • A mere list of tools – write sentences!

6. Current status

Hast du schon an der Idee gearbeitet? Wenn ja, beschreibe kurz den aktuellen Stand und erkläre die geplanten Neuerungen.
[In English: Have you already worked on the idea? If so, briefly describe the current status and explain the planned new features.]

Why do we ask this question?	Some grantees have been working on their project for a long time, others apply with a new idea and familiarize themselves with the topic during the funding period. Both approaches (and everything in between) are perfectly fine. There is no right or wrong: we just want to understand the project and estimate the time required for implementation. For projects that have been running for some time, we recommend making it clear how the part to be funded is clearly distinct from the rest of the project. This could be a new feature or module – an "improvement to the existing software" is not sufficient for funding. In short: **What** is the status of your project?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• If the project already exists: What has been accomplished so far, what will be different after the funding phase? • Even if the project does not yet officially exist, have you already worked on it, tried it out, discussed it? • Just "no" is fine if the project has not yet been worked on.
What don't we want to read here?	• The Prototype Fund supports software, which means that we can only select projects that mostly involve development work for funding. Existing projects where, for example, "only" documentation, release and marketing are planned are unfortunately not eligible.

7. Link to the project

Link zum bestehenden Projekt (falls vorhanden) (optional)
[In English: Link to the existing project (if available)]

Why do we ask this question?	Because it's always helpful if we can see exactly what you're working on! Feel free to share a link with us where we can view the current status of the project, even if it's just notes or a "quick and dirty" attempt that you're not (yet) proud of. This helps to understand the project better! In short: Quite simply – the **link** to the project.
What do we like reading here?	• A link to a project page, to a slide deck, to a Github repository, to a demo server, etc.
What don't we want to read here?	• A link to another project that has nothing to do with the application, but shows your own experience in other software projects (this will come later).

8. Innovation

THIS QUESTION APPLIES ONLY TO THE FUNDING TRACKS ‘INNOVATION’ AND ‘UP AND COMING’.

Was ist das Innovative an deinem Projekt? Wenn es ähnliche Projekte gibt, was geht bei deinem Ansatz darüber hinaus und warum kannst du nicht auf ihnen aufbauen?
[In English: What is innovative about your project? If there are similar projects, how does your approach go beyond them, and why can’t you build on them?]

Why do we ask this question?	Here we would like to check whether you have looked at whether your project is innovative and into available alternatives. Have you researched if the software you want to build already exists? It is very rare that no similar projects are to be found. Are the existing projects still active, are they available under a FOSS license, how does your project differ from the existing approaches? Also often relevant: Why don't you want to or can't you build on specific existing projects? In short: **What** makes your project different from what already exists?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Examples of projects that are similar to your idea and why they do not address the problem you want to solve • What is different and better about your project than existing alternatives?
What don’t we want to read here?	• The unsubstantiated claim that no projects are comparable to yours. This does not make the project appear more innovative, but will rather look like the application is not so well thought through

8a. Alternatives

THIS QUESTION APPLIES ONLY TO THE FUNDING TRACK ‘RESILIENCE’.

Inwiefern bietet dein Projekt eine bessere Alternative zu etablierten proprietären Technologien und Softwareprodukten oder verbessert eine bereits bestehende Open-Source-Alternative?
[In English: To what extent does your project provide a better alternative to established proprietary technologies and software products, or improve upon an existing open-source alternative?]

Why do we ask this question?	Through this funding track, the Prototype Fund supports projects that offer an alternative to centralized solutions or strengthen their existence. Funding is provided for free and open source alternatives that enable communities to use software in a sovereign and customized manner and, where possible, build on decentralized approaches. Here you can explain how your project fits in with this particular funding track. In short: For **which** established proprietary software programmes do I intend to provide or improve an alternative, and **how**?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• An established, proprietary technology for which you plan to provide an alternative • Why is this particular alternative the better one? There may be various reasons for this: technological, social, environmental and so on – all of which are relevant in this context.
What don’t we want to read here?	• Open Source projects. We're thinking 'replace Google' here, not 'can I do better than Nextcloud?'

9. User & target group

THIS QUESTION APPLIES ONLY TO THE FUNDING TRACKS ‘INNOVATION’ AND ‘UP AND COMING’.

Wer ist die Zielgruppe und wie soll dein Projekt sie erreichen?

[In English: Who are the potential users of your project and how do you want to reach them?]

Why do we ask this question?	We want to understand if you have thought about who will use your project. And we want to know how you want to reach these users! In short: **Who** is the project important **for**?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Clearly defined user groups, whether niche or broad – both can be appropriate, depending on the project. • Ideas on how to reach these users • Information about existing contacts, project partners, communities
What don’t we want to read here?	• Vague plans: You want to give talks at conferences? Give an example. Are you looking for project partners? Name some possible organizations, communities or companies you would like to get in touch with.

9a. User & target group

THIS QUESTION APPLIES ONLY TO THE FUNDING TRACK ‘RESILIENCE’.

Wer ist die Zielgruppe deines Projekts und wie willst du sie neben der technischen Entwicklung frühzeitig erreichen und für die Nutzung gewinnen?
[In English: Who are the intended users of your project, and how do you plan to reach them at an early stage – alongside the technical development – and encourage them to use it?]

Why do we ask this question?	Reaching users is one of the key objectives of the ‘Resilience’ funding track. We want to know who will use your project and how you intend to reach these users. Outline the specific measures you will implement during the six-month funding period, alongside software development. In this funding stream, you can plan to spend around 50% of the funded time on measures to reach users (guided estimate) – it shouldn’t just be about code! In short: **Who** is the project important for and **how** will I reach these users?
Length	175 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Clearly defined user groups, clear plans reach these users • Information about existing contacts, project partners, communities
What don’t we want to read here?	• Vague plans: You want to give talks at conferences? Give an example. Looking for project partners? Name possible organizations, communities or companies you would like to get in touch with. • That you just want to write code – then this is the wrong funding track for you

10. Milestones

Skizziere kurz die wichtigsten Meilensteine, die im Förderzeitraum umgesetzt werden sollen.
[In English: Briefly outline the most important milestones that are to be implemented during the funding period.]

Why do we ask this question?	Milestones always give us a good insight into how you proceed with the implementation of a project and how you structure your work. Of course, the milestones may change slightly during the funding period, as unforeseen obstacles can always be encountered during the development of prototypes or certain steps may prove to be superfluous. Simply try to estimate as well as possible what your funding period might look like. In short: **When** should the individual steps of the project be implemented?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• A list of milestones as planned for the six-months funding period. We like to see numbered steps or bullet points here. • Rough timelines (e.g. in weeks or months) are also very helpful for us. • For "Resilience": Both code and non-code milestones!
What don't we want to read here?	• "1/ Backend, 2/ Frontend" - this is too vague to be able to evaluate your plan.

11. Team

Bewerbt ihr euch als Team um die Förderung? Für Teams: Namen der Teammitglieder (verbindliche Nennung), Funktion im Team sowie geschätzte Wochenstunden pro Teammitglied
[In English: Are you applying for funding as a team? For teams: Names of team members (binding statement), role within the team and estimated working hours per week per team member. Note: Teams can consist of up to 4 people. (optional - please leave blank only if you want to apply alone)]
Funding track "Up and Coming": The first question has already been answered in the "Eligibility" section on page 6.

Why do we ask this question?	Team members cannot be added or replaced after funding has been approved. We want to assess whether the team has all the necessary skills to carry out the project.
Length	30 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Names of the team members, position in the team, if possible please include a link to a Github account or similar • An estimate of the weekly working hours per team member. During the funding period, these figures may be adjusted as required for the project, as long as the overall breakdown of working hours per team member remains roughly consistent with the figures given in the application. • Up and Coming: The mentor may take on a maximum of 10% of the total number of hours
What don't we want to read here?	• Teams consisting of more than four people • Team compositions that are not final: Teams will be funded according to the information provided in the application.

12. Experience

An welchen Software-Projekten hast du / habt ihr bisher gearbeitet? Bei Open-Source-Projekten bitte einen Link zum Repository angeben
[In English: Which software projects have you worked on so far? For open source projects, please provide a link to the repository

Note: Please provide a maximum of 3 project examples (with name and/or link to the repository)](optional)

Why do we ask this question?	We want to be able to assess whether you are technically capable of implementing the project. In short: **What** experience is relevant for your application?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Project names with links and a brief description of the extent to which you have worked on the project - e.g. maintainer, regular contributor, designer or you simply made a few pull requests. • A short description (one sentence) of the project, if no public link to the project can be provided.
What don't we want to read here?	• More than three projects per team member • Long descriptions

13. Eligibility

*Bist du oder sind deine Teammitglieder Gesellschafter*innen einer GmbH (oder andere Unternehmensform), haben einen Verein oder eine Organisation gegründet oder arbeiten für einen thematisch mit dem Projekt verbundenen Verein, ein Forschungsinstitut o. Ä. ?*
Wenn ja, erläutere, weshalb das Projekt nicht dazu dient, eine für den eigenen Geschäftsbetrieb benötigte Software zu entwickeln.
[In English: Are you or any of your team members shareholders in a GmbH (or another type of company), have you set up an association or organisation, or do you work for an association, research institute or similar body whose remit is related to the project? If so, please explain why the project is not intended to develop software required for your own business operations.
Note: Missing or incorrect information may result in exclusion from funding at later stages of the application process. (optional)]
Funding track "Up and Coming": The question has already been answered in the "Eligibility" section on page 6.

Why do we ask this question?	The Prototype Fund exclusively supports individual developers and small teams – not companies, NGOs, universities or other institutions, also not indirectly. We need to assess whether your project is eligible for funding.
Length	100 words
What do we like reading here?	• "I work for a company/organization in the same field as my project / I am active in an NGO dealing with the same topic / I am conducting research at an institute on topic XYZ / (...) and in this way I ensure a clear separation between my project and the institution." • Unsure? Too much information is better than not enough!
What don't we want to read here?	• Intransparent answers – we will find out about this when dealing with the formalities.

14. Working hours

Wie viele Stunden willst du (bzw. will das Team) in den 6 Monaten Förderzeitraum insgesamt an der Umsetzung arbeiten?

[In English: How many hours in total do you (or does the team) plan to work on the realization of the project during the 6-month funding period?Note: Please enter a number only – max. 950 h for one person or max. 1,900 h for teams.The maximum funding is €47,500 for one person or €95,000 for teams. Read in our FAQ how the funding amounts are calculated.]

Why do we ask this question?	We would like to know how much time you need to complete the project and assess whether your plans are realistic. In short: **How much time** do you need to implement the project?
What do we like reading here?	• Just the number of hours is enough!
What don't we want to read here?	• A number higher than 950 for one person or 1900 for teams - this is the upper limit for funding. • A very low amount of hours (less than approx. 250 hours) for which the administrative effort of the grant is not justified. • A "strategic" underestimation or overestimation of the workload. A project has no more chance of being funded if you plan more or fewer hours. However, we will assess whether the planned amount of time is realistic. • A number of hours per week: The total number of hours for the funding period should be written here.

15. Motivation

Erfahrung, Hintergrund, Motivation, Perspektive: Was sollte die Jury über dich (bzw. euch) wissen und bei der Auswahl berücksichtigen?
[In English: Experience, background, motivation, perspective: What should the jury know about you and take into account when assessing your application?]

Why do we ask this question?	We are interested to hear why the project matters to you. Are you personally affected by the problem you want to solve? Do you have experience that is key to the project? Have you been working on the topic at hand for some time, are you an expert in the field? Here you can provide us with all the information that is important for our review. We like to call this question a "wild card": You decide **what** else we should know about you and the project!
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Personal experience, relevant (technical or other) knowledge, information about the team structure, background information about the project • If you don't have an account on GitHub, Bitbucket or a similar platform, you can explain here why you are unable to share any code you have written with us. • Information on expertise in specific fields: For a project in the medical, legal or educational field (among others) to be successfully implemented, it is beneficial to have people with expertise in these areas on the team. For inclusion or accessibility projects, the participation of people who are directly affected is especially important. Please let us know if the expertise relevant to your project – beyond programming experience – is represented in your team. If this is not the case, tell us how you intend to access the expertise required for your project, for example through partnerships or expert advice.

Second Stage

At Prototype Fund, you have the opportunity to apply for a funding extension. These four additional months are intended to help you ensure that your project is sustainable. Depending on the project, this could involve preparing to set up a company, extensive user testing, building a community, etc. If you are planning to apply for the second phase of funding, you should let us know now.

The maximum number of hours for the Second Stage is calculated based on the hours from the first funding phase. That means that you can request up to 100% of the sum in the Second Stage if you requested 100% in the regular funding phase, up to 50% in the Second Stage if you requested 50% in the regular funding phase, etc.

The participants in the Second Stage are selected via an internal application process in the fourth month of the funding period. You can only take part in this selection process if you apply for Second Stage funding as part of your current application. **If you apply now without including the Second Stage, you will not be able to add it later.**

Important: **Further coding milestones are not eligible for funding during the Second Stage.** This phase is about building sustainable structures around your project.

For the 'Resilience' funding track, applying for the Second Stage is mandatory. As with the other funding tracks, the final decision on funding for the Second Stage will be made in the fourth month of the funding period.

Further information can be found on our Website.

16. Second Stage funding

THIS QUESTION APPLIES ONLY TO THE FUNDING TRACKS ‘INNOVATION’ AND ‘UP AND COMING’.

Beantragst du die viermonatige Second-Stage-Förderung nach Ablauf der sechsmonatigen regulären Förderung?
[In English: Do you apply for the four-month Second Stage funding extension after the six-month regular funding ends?]

Why do we ask this question?

For formal reasons, you have to decide at the application stage whether you want to apply for Second Stage funding. The aim of the four-month extension is to ensure that the project is sustainable.

Now is the time to think about whether work other than writing code would be useful to your project after the regular funding phase. Does the project need time to build a community, found a company or a non-profit, conduct an intensive user testing and design phase, or develop a campaign or communication strategy in order to continue to exist in a stable manner after the funding phase?

In short: Does the Second Stage **make sense** for your project?

What do we like reading here?

- A yes or a no – either is fine with us. Not every good project needs Second Stage funding.

What don’t we want to read here?

- “I’m not sure yet.” You have to convince us now that your application is well thought out. During the funding time, a final decision will be made as to whether an extension makes sense for your project. You can find more information about the Second Stage on our website.

17. Second Stage: focus

Wenn du eine Verlängerung beantragen möchtest: Erzähle uns kurz, was dein Projekt braucht, um aus dem Prototypen-Stadium herauszukommen und wie du dein Projekt in den vier Monaten nachhaltig aufbauen willst.
[In English: If you want to apply for the Second Stage: Tell us briefly what your project needs to move beyond the prototype stage and how you intend to build your project sustainably over the four months.]
(optional – mandatory if you apply for the Second Stage and for all applicants to the 'Resilience' funding track)

Why do we ask this question?	If you have decided that the Second Stage is right for your project, we would like to know what you want to achieve in the additional four months. We know that this phase is still far in the future and that a lot can change during the initial funding phase – and that's perfectly fine. At this point, we want to see if you have a plan to make your project sustainable – what do you need to do right after developing the prototype to make sure the project is still around in five or ten years? In short: What's your **strategy** to make sure your project doesn't end next year?
Length	175 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• Plans that are as concrete as possible and specifically tailored to your project. • Evidence that you have a clear strategy that goes beyond writing code for your project.
What don't we want to read here?	• Vague plans: Even if this phase is still a long way off, you need to convince us that you have thought this part through as well.

18. Second Stage: milestones

Skizziere kurz die wichtigsten Meilensteine, die in der viermonatigen Verlängerung deines Förderzeitraum umgesetzt werden sollen.
[In English: Briefly outline the most important milestones that are to be implemented during the four-months funding extension period.]
(optional – mandatory if you are applying for Second Stage funding)

Why do we ask this question?	Milestones always give us a good insight into how you proceed with a project and how you structure your work. Just as for the regular funding period, this helps us to evaluate your project plans for the Second Stage funding. As this regards the second part of the funding period, we are aware that a number of things may still change in the meantime. Simply try to estimate as well as possible what your Second Stage funding period might look like. In short: **When** should the individual steps of the project be implemented?
Length	100 words max.
What do we like reading here?	• A list of milestones as planned for the four-months funding period. We like to see numbered steps or bullet points here. • Rough timelines (weeks or months) are also very helpful.
What don't we want to read here?	• A focus on programming work. In the Second Stage funding period, the primary focus is on making the project sustainable through other types of activities. Any programming work done in the Second Stage naturally arises from the regular funding period and is, for example, based on feedback or user testing. • "1/ Community building, 2/ Advertising" - this is too vague to be able to evaluate your plan.

19. Checkboxes

*Einzelentwickler*innen: Ich bin über 18 Jahre alt und habe meinen Hauptwohnsitz in Deutschland.GbRs: Der GbR-Sitz sowie der Wohnsitz der Geschäftsführung liegen in Deutschland. Die Wohnorte einzelner Teammitglieder können sich im Ausland befinden (max. ein Drittel des Teams, d. h. eine Person bei einem Team aus drei oder vier Personen).*
[In English: Individual developers: I am over 18 years of age and my main place of residence is in Germany. GbRs (Teams): The GbR's registered address and the place of residence of the team lead are in Germany. Individual team members may reside abroad (up to one third of the team, i.e. one person in a team of three or four).]

Why do we ask this question?

We can only fund you if you are over 18 and the main applicant is based in Germany. Team members from other countries can be funded if the GbR is based in Germany (up to one third of the team, i.e. one person in a team of three or four).

Ich bin damit einverstanden, die Projektergebnisse unter einer Open-Source-Lizenz (z. B. MIT-Lizenz), öffentlich zugänglich (z. B. über Github/Gitlab/Codeberg) zur Verfügung zu stellen.
[In English: I agree to make the project publicly available (e.g. via Github/Gitlab/Codeberg) under an open source license (e.g. MIT license).]

Why do we ask this question?

We only support free and open source software projects. FOSS software can be further developed by anyone who can write code and has access to the Internet. This enables broad participation and ensures that resources are used efficiently.

Checklist: I have checked carefully that...

- I have read the Prototype Fund website and I am familiar with the focus and structure of the fund.
- I considered which of the three funding tracks is the right one for me. I made sure to fill in the correct form.
- I am applying for a software project.
- I am not applying as a company, institution or association, but as a private individual. My team consists of a maximum of four members.
- My application is entirely written in German or English.
- I have written my application in such a way that even someone who is not an expert in my field can understand what I want to do.
- In doing so, I answered the questions: What (do I want to do?), How (will I implement my project?), Why (is this needed?), Who (is my target group?).
- I have considered whether Second Stage funding might be useful for my project. If so, I have applied directly for this funding. I understand that I cannot receive Second Stage funding later if I do not apply for it now.
- I had my application read by an external person. An external view can provide good indications that, for example, something is not clear or important information is missing.
- I have described the technical implementation of my project in concrete terms: specific tools, programming languages, libraries, architecture, etc.
- I have identified my target audiences and thought of how to reach them.
- I have listed the milestones for the implementation of the project. "1/ Backend, 2/ Frontend" is not sufficient for the application.
- I have checked whether there is already an open source version of my project. It is better to acknowledge the existence of similar projects and explain how your project differs from them than to pretend they don't exist – or to refrain from applying if you realize that your idea is not significantly different from existing tools.
- I have assessed that my project can be implemented in the number of hours I have indicated.

After the application

You can find the timeline for the application here.

Selection phase

December 2026 - February 2027

After receiving the applications, the Prototype Fund and our Project Management teams review them and create a shortlist based on formal criteria. The shortlist is then presented to the jury. The jury evaluates these and potentially other applications received and makes a project selection. The jury meeting will take place at the beginning of February. 25 to 30 projects will be selected and proposed to the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space for funding. The ministry reviews the proposals. All applicants will be notified of the decision in March.
Important: We kindly request that you do not enquire about the status of your application before mid-March.

Application Workshop and Formal Application

March 2027

We invite all selected projects to an application consultation via video call.
Participation is mandatory for individual developers or at least one person per team. You will receive support in preparing the formal application. This will then be submitted to the funding body BMFTR via the Project Management, which will make the final decision on funding. In exceptional cases, the legally binding funding decision from the ministry will not be received until the start of funding itself, particularly in the event of queries or additional claims. Bear this in mind if, for example, you want to agree changes to working hours with employers or similar.

Kick-Off Workshop

around June 1st, 2027

The Kick-Off workshop marks the official start of the funding phase.All projects in the class get to know the Prototype Fund team, the project management agency and each other, receive further information about the funding period and sharpen the vision for their project. **Participation is mandatory for all grantees.**

Regular Funding phase

June 1st, 2027 - November 30th, 2027

During the funding period, the grantees work intensively on their projects. They are in contact with the rest of their class and the Prototype Fund team. They are also entitled to coaching in the areas of project management, usability, branding, founding, etc.

Selection for Second Stage funding

September 2027 - October 2027

All those who have applied for a ten-month funding period submit a presentation and present their projects in an online selection meeting. Based on the submission and the presentation, a committee of jurors, the Prototype Fund and the project

management agency proposes the funding of the second-stage period to the BMFTR, which decides on the four-month funding period.

Demo Day

around December 1st, 2026

The Demo Day is a public event, where all grantees present their experiences and project results as demos, in lectures or on panels after the six-month funding phase. **Participation is mandatory for all grantees.**

Second Stage

December 1st, 2027 – March 31st, 2028

During the four-month Second Stage, selected projects work on making their project usable and known. The focus is on user testing, community building and public relations, or financial security. Technical work is less of a priority.

Second Stage Final Workshop

around April 1st, 2028

The final workshop of the Second Stage will be semi-public, with selected guests invited by the projects and program participants. The focus will be on detailed project presentations and an in-depth discussion of the results of the Second Stage. **Participation is mandatory for all grantees of the Second Stage.**

The Prototype Fund

The Prototype Fund is a funding program of the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), which is managed and evaluated by the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany.

The Prototype Fund is the first low-threshold funding program for independent developers and small teams creating innovative open-source software. We provide the tech-savvy civil society with access to the resources and processes needed for developing user-centered, innovative software projects.

Since 2016, we have funded over 400 projects. As a learning funding program, we have repeatedly made adjustments to become more efficient and effective. Now we are taking the next step and implementing some changes. For the future funding phases, we are focusing on funding data security and software building blocks.

Apply with your ideas for innovative open source software in the public interest! You will receive up to €95,000 in funding over 6 months or €158,000 over 10 months. We will also provide you with coaching, consulting and networking opportunities.

prototypefund.de

info@prototypefund.de

@prototypefund@mastodon.social